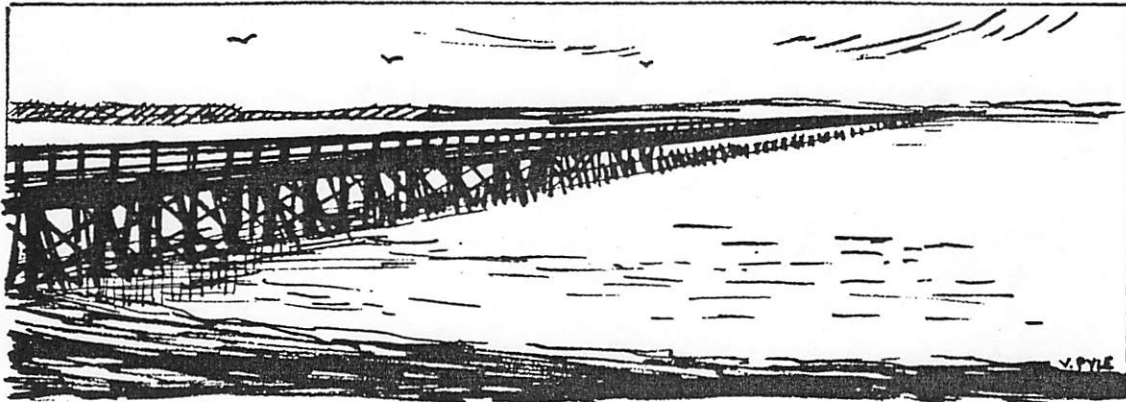


# Duxbury's Fight for . . .

*Powder Point Bridge*



## . . . "The Bridge"

The 87-year old Powder Point Bridge in Duxbury, Massachusetts, is believed to be the longest wooden bridge in the country. The bridge which is just short of a half-mile long, spans a tidewater inlet providing access between Powder Point and the outer Duxbury Beach. However, time has gnawed away at the timbers and piles, and it was up to the town of Duxbury to decide if it would appropriate funds for repair so the bridge would continue to serve as an access to the outer beach.

On June 29, 1974 at a special town meeting in Duxbury, voters approved \$11,200 for plans and specification for the repair of the bridge. Voters authorized the selectmen to petition the General Court for enactment of legislature to allow the town bond not exceeding \$500,000 for the repairs. The House then gave initial approval to the bill allowing the town to borrow the \$500,000 for repairs.

The bridge which was originally constructed in 1887 has been the town's responsibility for 33 years by an act of legislature. During that time Duxbury has spent \$209,000 for repairs.

In 1887 an act was passed by the state to incorporate the Gurnet Bridge Company, authorizing the corporation to build and maintain a pile bridge across the waters of Duxbury harbor commencing at a point on Powder Point and extending easterly in a straight line to a point on Salter's beach. William J. Wright, a benefactor to the town of Duxbury, was one of the three members of the corporation.

The bridge had to be at least 20 feet wide and have a suitable draw with a clear width of not less than 24 feet for the passage of vessels. The county commissioners were petitioned to lay out and build the bridge and were authorized to borrow the necessary money. The commissioners were also to decide what towns in the county would receive specific benefit from the building of the bridge and to assess them a portion of the cost of construction.

Under the act which took effect June 1, 1887, the cost of repairing and maintaining the bridge was to be borne by the town of Duxbury.

In 1904, another act took effect placing maintenance and care of the bridge under the county commissioners. For proper repair, annually assessed were the town of

Duxbury, paying one-third; the town of Plymouth, one-sixth; Marshfield, one-ninth; Kingston, one-eighteenth; and Plymouth County, one-third.

A report made to the county commissioner in 1934 by Howard E. Bailey, civil engineer, states "Practically all the original piles are still under the bridge . . . To insure reasonable safety over a period of the next few years, a program of replacing piles, panels, timber work and blocking pile heads is recommended continuing the present policy of repairing at a rate of \$5,000 or more per year."

In his conclusion Mr Bailey said, "in considering the cost of carrying out the above program amounting to \$20,000 or more in the next year or two with continued yearly expenditure of \$5,000 or more, the question arises as to whether the bridge is worth maintaining. Without doubt, to be perfectly safe, the bridge should be completely rebuilt at a cost of from \$65,000 to \$100,000 depending on the details of work. Before next season, the county should be prepared to expend \$25,000 or more or adopt other measures looking toward a new bridge or its discontinuance." The bridge had originally been built at a cost of about \$30,000.

In 1936 the county commissioners employed counsel to report on responsibility for further care of the bridge, and found there was no possibility of their getting rid of the responsibility except by act of legislature.

Since the parking space at the other end of the bridge was restricted to the use of Duxbury residents, the county commissioners were as reluctant as anyone to keep the bridge in repair. The parking space was privately owned, and the only restrictions the county commissioners could put on the bridge was the weight limit.

On Nov. 30, 1938, the county commissioners held a conference concerning the bridge. It was attended by the selectmen from Duxbury, Plymouth, Kingston, Marshfield, and the county engineer. A committee of five was appointed to consider the entire situation and report at a later hearing.

In 1941, following a series of debates with state officials over control of the beach and bridge, Duxbury voters elected to share the cost of maintenance of the bridge with the Duxbury Beach Association. By vote of the county the bridge was turned over to Duxbury.



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